

# THE SHEET ANCHOR

## National Labor Unions in Canada

By

LAWRENCE DRUMMOND, LL.L.

"Quebec, in the midst of the turmoil  
of troubled conditions in the world,  
will yet prove to be the sheet anchor  
of civilization."

(LORD SHAUGHNESSY, Oct. 1, 1919)

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# *National Labor Unions in Canada*

## A Growing Power

When Mr. Robertson, Federal Minister of Labor, was asked why no delegates from the National Labor Unions in Canada had been invited to the National Industrial Conference held in Ottawa, last September (1919), he stated, amongst other reasons, that these National Labor Unions had a membership of only 2,800.

Mr. Robertson was misinformed; the Quebec National Labor Unions have at this moment (November 1919), a membership of 30,000; they are increasing daily and bid fair soon to outnumber the International Labor Unions in the Province of Quebec.

## National vs. International Unions

International Unions are not, as a rule, governed by sound principles of law and order. Judging the tree by its fruits, or by the frequency and seriousness of strikes called by International Unions, and which not unfrequently result in a minimum of advantages for the strikers<sup>1</sup> and in a maximum of inconvenience for the public. — International Unions do not make for peace and harmony. They preach war to the death between classes; they tell the workman that he must better his condition by fair means or by foul. Like a storm-tossed ship without a pilot, their deluded members are driven hither and thither by every wind of doctrine.

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<sup>1</sup> It has been estimated that the strikes which occurred during the month of June alone caused a loss of nearly \$6,000,000.00 in wages.

On the other hand, National Labor Unions in Quebec are founded on uncompromisingly Christian principles. Their leaders are responsible Canadians, who thoroughly grasp the local wants of workers who are their fellow citizens. They endeavor to obtain advantages for them, not because American unionists claim like advantages, but because, after mature consideration, they deem it right that they should obtain them and also because they deem their employers in a position to grant them. For, be it observed, — a point not unfrequently overlooked by International Unions, — if one of these two conditions be wanting, right on the part of the workman or ability on the part of the employer, a claim is not justifiable.

Now, applying the touchstone of results to our National Labor Unions, we cannot better portray the harmony which they have hitherto contributed to preserve among us, and will no doubt continue so doing, than by repeating the words of Lord Shaftesbury in a recent speech, at Quebec : "Quebec, in the midst of the turmoil of troubled conditions in the world, will yet prove to be the sheet anchor of civilization."

### *Scope of this tract*

The object of this tract is to show :

1. The attitude of the Church towards Labor Unions and the spirit of justice with which she inspires them.
2. The attitude of National Labor Unions in Canada and their admirable response to Christian guidance.

## PART I

### THE CHURCH AND LABOR UNIONS

Some people are under the impression that the Church frowns more or less on Labor Unions. Now this impression is contrary to facts. The Church may condemn the spirit and unjustifiable acts of certain labor organizations; but, from her earliest days, she has ever been the workman's friend and has always recommended that workmen be grouped together for their greater welfare. Besides, history attests that the working classes were never happier than at the time of the old *guilds*, formed under the inspiration of the Church.

#### Christ and the workman

That the Church should be specially interested in the workman is easy to understand.

What is a workman?

A workman is he who toils with his hands, painfully striving to earn a living for himself and his family. Sad was his condition in the truly "dark ages" of antiquity. Pagans treated him like a slave and a beast of burden. But lo! Christ appeared among men and gradually his condition changed for the better. For God Himself became a workman. Leaving His throne on high, He came down and dwelt among men, not in a royal palace surrounded with courtiers but in the humble cottage of a workman. *Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary* Yes, Christ was in every sense of the word, a workman. He handled the tools of a workman, He earned His daily bread like a workman.

What a transformation! No wonder the Church cherishes the poor worker as the choicest portion of her flock, since her Lord and Master was himself a workman. Surely he who says the Church looks askance at the working classes must know very little of her early history!

## THE CHURCH AND THE WORKMAN THROUGH- OUT THE AGES OF FAITH

Nor is her sympathy less marked as time rolls on. St John Chrysostom, St. Gregory Nazianzen and all the Fathers and Doctors of the Church bid the rich man be mindful of his duties towards the poor; they condemn all kinds of oppression and command him to give generously of his surplus wealth.

<sup>1</sup> *It is lawful, says Thomas Aquinas, for a man to hold private property ; and it is also necessary for the carrying on of human life. But, if it be asked, How must one's possessions be used, the Church replies without hesitation; Man should not consider his outward possessions as his own, but as common to all, so as to share them without difficulty when others are in need. Whence the Apostle saith, Charge the rich of this world to give easily, to communicate to others.*

True, no one is commanded to give others what he needs for himself and family; nor even to give away what is required to keep up becomingly his condition in life; for no one ought to live unbecomingly. But when necessity has been suitably supplied, it is a duty to relieve want with what is over. *That which remaineth give alms.*

*He that hath a talent, says Gregory the Great, let him see that he hideth not; he that hath abundance, let him not slack in mercy and generosity; he that hath art and skill, let him do his best to share the use and utility thereof with his neighbor.*

Furthermore, throughout nineteen centuries, who multiplied works of mercy and charitable institutions for poor workmen? The Church. Who opened schools for their children, hospitals for their sick, asylums for their cripples? The Church, always the Church?

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<sup>1</sup> These quotations and the comments thereon are taken from Leo XIII's encyclical *Rerum Novarum*.

## The Church and Labor Associations

If the Church has always been particularly solicitous for the workman's welfare, it stands to reason that she must have sought the best means of protecting him both against the greed of unfeeling masters and against his own improvidence.

Now, of all human means of self-protection, the most effectual is doubtless association. Union is strength: *the brother that is helped by his brother is like a strong city.* Moreover, does not nature teach the same lesson? Look at the grain of sand. Alone it is nothing, but heap up myriads of grains and you will raise a wall strong enough to baffle the angry waves. But above all look at man. Alone, what can he do? Now group him with other men and he grows invincible; he carries everything before him. In the late war, the Allies achieved no lasting results till they were perfectly united and marched like one man under the undivided command of Marshal Foch.

In like manner, whenever a man has sought to do something great and permanent, he has combined with other men, he has turned towards those whose interests were identical with his and formed numerous and powerful groups under various names: academies, colleges, syndicates, associations which bind together those who are striving for the success of the same ideas, the same work or the same profession.

This natural tendency to associate is a right which the Church has always recognized. And one of her glories, which unscrupulous demagogues now seek to deny, is precisely to have encouraged and urged workmen to unite. She inspired the formation and guided the progress of the old artisans' guilds, so conducive to the uplifting of the working classes. These guilds or unions grouped together craftsmen in the same trade for the promotion of their particular interests, while they fostered just and friendly relations between workmen and employers.

## The French Revolution and Labor Unions

Now, because certain abuses had crept into these time-honored guilds, the Great Revolution of 1789, instead of merely reforming them and suffering them to pursue their beneficent work, swept them away, thereby undoing the work of centuries and leaving the workman isolated and defenceless, in as bad a plight as he had been two thousand years before, under pagan slavery. All labor associations being prohibited, the masses fell once more an easy prey to unscrupulous speculators.

Thus were sown the seeds of discontent, hatred and envy, and Socialism loomed up, a violent but mistaken reaction against an unbearable situation.

Nor could the Church, which was then persecuted and ostracized from public life, come to the toiler's assistance.

## Leo XIII and the Working Classes

In the course of the last century, the Church gradually regained enough influence to raise her voice once more in behalf of labor

Some thirty years ago, Leo XIII, *the Workman's Friend*, issued an encyclical or message to the world on *The Condition of the Working Classes*, which has been rightly called *The Workingman's Charter*. For just as, in the Middle Ages, *Magna Charta* was the declaration of the rights of the people, so, in our own times, Leo XIII's message was the declaration of the rights of the workingman.

How admirably the learned Pontiff lays down the rules governing the labor question may be judged by a few quotations.

In expounding the duties of the State towards the worker, he says in part :

*Justice demands that his interests be carefully watched over, so that he who contributes so largely to public welfare may share in it, that being housed, clothed, and enabled to*

support life, his existence may be more endurable. *Solicitude for the well-being of the workers will injure no interest; on the contrary it will benefit all; for it must benefit the commonwealth to secure from misery those on whom it so largely depends.*

No detail seems to escape the Holy Father's searching solicitude:—

*If by a strike, or other combination of workmen, the public peace were endangered; if among the laboring population the ties of family were relaxed; if Religion were found to suffer though lack of time and opportunity to practise it; if in workshops and factories morals were endangered through the mingling of sexes or other occasions of evil; or if employers laid unjust burdens upon the workmen, or degraded them with conditions repugnant to their dignity as human beings; finally, if health were endangered by excessive labor, or by work unsuited to sex or age — it would then be right, within certain limits, to call in the help and authority of the law.*

Further on, he sheds a new light on two most intricate questions, that of saving labor from speculators and that of child labor :

1, *Saving labor from speculators: The first concern of all is to save the poor workers from grasping speculators, who use human beings as mere instruments for making money. It is neither justice nor humanity so to grind men down as to stupefy their minds and wear out their bodies. . . . Daily labor, therefore, must not be protracted during longer hours than strength admits. . . . Those who labor in mines and quarries, and work within the bowels of the earth, should have shorter hours in proportion to the severity of their labor. Finally, work suitable for a strong man cannot reasonably be required from a woman or a child.*

2. *Employers' moral obligation to pay fair wages: Grant that workman and employer make free agreements, especially as to wages; nevertheless, it is a dictate of nature, more imperious and more ancient than any bargain between man and man, that the remuneration must be enough to support the wage-earner in reasonable comfort. If, through necessity or fear of worse, the workman is compelled to accept harder conditions, he is the victim of force or injustice.*

### Leo XIII and Labor Unions

Lastly, Leo XIII advocates Workmen's Associations as the best means of affording assistance to those in need, and of drawing the two orders closely together : *Most important of all are Workmen's Associations, for these virtually include all the rest.* But he lays down as a general and perpetual law that *Religion and morality must be a prime consideration with these Associations and govern their internal discipline...* What advantage can it be to a workman to obtain by means of a society all that he requires, and to endanger his soul for want of spiritual food? What doth it profit a man to gain the whole world, and suffer the loss of his own soul?...

With Religion as the foundation, we next determine the relations of the members, that they may live in concord, prosperously and successfully... The rights and duties of employers should be carefully weighed with the rights and duties of the employed. If either an employer or a workman deems himself injured, a committee of honest and capable men should be appointed to decide the dispute by the laws of the Association. One of the purposes of a Society should be to arrange for continuous work; and to create a fund to help members in their necessities, in case of accident, as well as in sickness, old age, and misfortune.

## PART II

### NATIONAL LABOR UNIONS IN CANADA

#### The Labor Convention at Three Rivers Sept. 1919

Now, turning to the National Unions in the Province of Quebec, we shall see the foregoing principles in operation. In this respect the Labor Convention held in Three Rivers, on September 21, 22 and 23, 1919, is an object lesson, deserving of imitation by such as are anxious to secure for our fair Dominion the fruits of a hard-won peace.

In the large guild-hall, under the shadow of Three Rivers Cathedral, were convened 120 delegates representing 63 national organizations and 30,000 workmen from all parts of the Province. Some of these organizations had severed their International connections and cast their lot with National Unions. This was the case with several Quebec syndicates, whose evolution from the vagaries of Internationalism to the sane principles of law and order, as embodied in National Unions, is most interesting. Others, like the Saguenay groups, had been National from the outset. Some were of long-standing and were represented by white-haired men; others had just come into being, with mere youths as their spokesmen.

A spirit of friendliness pervaded the Convention. Were they not striving one and all for the same noble purpose, the betterment of their people? Heartened by the warm greeting of Bishop Cloutier, of Three Rivers, the Workingman's Practical Friend, and enlightened by the masterly address of Rev. Joseph P. Archambault, s. J., who expounded the attitude of the Church on the labor question, — the delegates were ready to deal with the various subjects set for their consideration.

### Order of proceedings

The best parliamentary methods were in order. Printed drafts of resolutions were first carefully considered in special committees, where they received a business-like form before being debated upon by the convention of delegates. The latter, being all *specialists*, brought their common experience to bear on any given point, and the ensuing discussion was much less rambling than in legislatures, where speakers are too frequently only *talkers*.

The delegates were anxious, above all, not to commit themselves to any rash "legislation". They wished to be true to their "constituents", and would thresh out a *resolution* and scrutinize it from every standpoint before unanimously voting it through.

Thus did the 120 delegates of the National Unions conscientiously fill up every moment of their time, with three sittings a day and private committees between times.

It now remains but to examine the chief questions which came up for discussion and the various resolutions passed thereon.

### High Cost of Living

No labor congress could be held without touching on this burning question which weighs so heavily on the laboring population. The delegates viewed the question from its true standpoint.

They no doubt upheld their right to increased salaries corresponding with the higher cost of living, but they made it a point to state their regret that increasing salaries should at present be the Canadian workman's only means of securing the necessities of life; they contended that to remedy the higher cost of living by increasing salaries was merely an expedient, only apparently beneficial to those who adopted it, that the advantages thus obtained by one group of workers were detrimental to those who did not obtain the same advantages, that this system

tended to ruin our industries, to multiply our economic difficulties and to foster a state of mind conducive to bankruptcy and revolution.

They demanded specific remedies : temporary limitation and in certain cases, prohibition of exportation of food products; establishment by the Federal Government in all large towns of cold storage warehouses open to all; curtailing of exaggerated profits by manufacturers and merchants.

The foregoing applied to governments, producers and dealers. As to consumers, the Convention urged unions to carry on a relentless campaign in behalf of economy, to promote food cooperatives, to induce people to live within their means, to see that women be trained to be good housewives, so that they may make their husbands' salaries go a long way.

### Working Hours

The resolution adopted under this heading was evidently framed by men who had sat at the school of experience and learned that *circumstances alter cases* :

*The Convention expresses the opinion that any provision enforcing a fixed number of hours for the legal working day is arbitrary, unwise and inopportune, but it maintains that the length of working days should be such as to give the workman a reasonable time to recuperate, to perform his duties as husband, father, citizen and Catholic and to do justice to the reasonable obligations of commerce, industry and finance.*

The Convention evidently did not pin its faith to the eight-hour doctrine. "We see no advantage", declared some of the speakers, "in legalizing a uniform eight-hour day for trades requiring little effort and carried on under favorable sanitary conditions. On the other hand, we find the same eight-hour day excessive for other very exhausting trades practised under most depressing conditions. Instead of claiming an arbitrary regulation which ignores obvious differences, we lay down the prin-

ciples governing the whole question and let the various trades conform to these principles according to their respective needs”.

“Less working hours and a higher salary is all very well”, remarked a speaker, but if every one does less and earns more, the cost of living will go rising and where will it stop? Then what about the poor devil who belongs to no union and can get no increase? Will *his* condition improve?”

Such considerateness even for the unrepresented element denotes a truly *catholic* spirit in the Convention.

### Conciliation and Arbitration

*The Convention, in the interest of public order and harmony between classes and to forestall unfortunately too frequent strikes, recommends, as a normal means of settling disputes between employers and workmen, voluntary conciliation and arbitration, on the basis of an equal representation in the choice of arbitrators and with the mutual agreement of accepting the tribunal's decision as final.*

*The Convention also recommends adding to the list of industries which come under the Lemieux Act, public utility services, such as railway, tramway, telephone, electric companies, banks, etc.*

*The Convention finally recommends that an arbitration tribunal with a binding decision be set up in dispute respecting the labor conditions of firemen and policemen, and that in organizing such arbitration tribunals the Government make it a rule to have the arbitrators appointed by the interested parties, even in the case of an appeal.*

The purport of the whole resolution is obvious : to avoid strikes and to minimize the drawbacks of labor disputes, thereby insuring stability for commerce and industry, which are the foundation of the common prosperity both of the employer and employee.

It will be observed that arbitration is compulsory only in the case of firemen and policemen. Men holding

such responsible positions, it was remarked, have no right to strike, but they have a right to a decent living wage and we ask that they be granted a way to obtain it, without endangering the public safety.

### Female and Child labor

These two questions could not fail to interest a labor convention most of whose members were married men with children.

First, as to female labor.

*The Convention deplors that in consequence of the Great War so happily ended, many women and girls were induced to undertake work incompatible with their sex, and hopes that all these women will soon resume occupations more suited to their aptitudes and duties. It also protests against those who, regardless of woman's physical health or moral well-being, compel her to do work beyond her strength and expose her to the dangers of immorality.*

*It calls upon the Government to see that women and girls who are obliged to earn their living be enabled to do their work under satisfactory sanitary conditions and with all necessary moral safeguards.*

*It particularly requests the Government of the Province of Quebec to enact a law prohibiting female labor in tanneries, currying and leather-dressing workshops.*

As to child labor :

*The Convention regrets to notice that too many young children work in factories, to the detriment of their health and of their moral and religious training, and earnestly hopes that the return of economic conditions to their normal state will enable fathers to meet their expenses without requiring their children to work. The Convention appeals to the kind feelings of all those who employ children, to see that they be given work suited to their age, that their morals be safeguarded and their training facilitated by the introduction of technical schools even in factories.*

Finally, the delegates, conscious that the wage earners' family is beset by perils even more fundamental than female and child labor, adopted a declaration against divorce.

### Sympathetic Strikes

The following report was adopted :

*Considering that sympathetic strikes are immoral and prejudicial to public order, the committee on resolutions recommends that the Convention declare itself categorically opposed to sympathetic strikes, but enjoins on labor unions to support, by all just and legitimate means, the claims of a union, through the employers and workmen carrying on the trade covered by that union.*

### Protestant Workmen

Any one apprehending racial or religious conflicts from the national labor movement should be reassured by the following resolution :

*Whereas certain rumors have circulated at large, alleging that the Catholic National Unions do not protect Protestant workmen on labor questions, the Convention protests against this false allegation and enters the following protest : The National Union of the South Shore Workmen earnestly protests that it has protected and still protects Protestant workmen on all labor questions, by giving them a joint member's card which guarantees all necessary protection.*

\* \* \*

What a spirit of justice, moderation and true brotherliness breathes in these *Resolutions* ! Such a spirit is bound to arouse practical interest in the National Labor Unions. May they continue to develop and prosper ! May they spread far and wide ! Their extension, besides being beneficial to workmen, will be an earnest of peace to employers and to the whole social fabric.

*Two Statements of two highly educated English-  
Canadians  
on French-Canadians and their standing in Canada.*

I. From *Bridging the Chasm* :

—While some of us are pretty thoroughly convinced that Quebec is unduly fearful of change, is it not true that Canada would suffer a distinct loss were Quebec to be made over and her thought and speech and life cast in the prevalent American mould? Is she not truest to Canada and does she not best serve the Canadian civilization of the future by not too readily renouncing the ideals and traditions which she embodies and represents?

While the rest of Canada has become largely American in thought and life, Quebec, more or less isolated, has preserved to a much greater extent a wholesomeness and simplicity and idealism, and to-day constitutes a refreshing contrast to the depressing monotony of our over commercialized existence. The English-speaking visitor from outside Quebec finds everywhere a civility, an innate politeness, that are delightful and strangely unlike some of the usages in his own province. He discovers also, that the good old-fashioned spirit of reverence is much more in evidence in French Canada than among his own people. In Quebec too, there still survives a love of poetry and legend, and a sense of the beauty of the mother tongue, and an enthusiasm for its cultivation amounting almost to a religion. Deeply enrooted, too, in the life of the people is a pride in the traditions and achievements of their race. In a word the heart of Quebec is still European. In the quiet of her cloisters there still lingers the atmosphere of old Normandy, and in the remote countryside the habitant still sings of *Malbrouk* and *Le Pont d'Avignon* as did his forefathers, centuries ago, in Northern France.

Plain-living, pious, deeply, almost religiously attached to his native hearth and soil, content with the wholesome joys; loyal to the faith he believes the true one, yet not unfriendly toward his neighbour who differs from him and whom, forgetful of differences of race and creed, he receives into his home; the real French-Canadian exhibits the sociability, courtesy, and hospitality of his race.

No small part of the prejudice against the French-Canadian is due to his religion, a creed which the Protestant English-Canadian has pigeon-holed under some convenient label as "medievalism," "superstition", "idolatry". With his more democratic church organisations, his widely diffused libraries, and his well-organized system of compulsory education, the Ontarian probably feels he has little or nothing to learn from poor, benighted Quebec. But is his own position quite as impregnable as he thinks it is? And would not a little more catholicity on his part be decidedly beneficial? He looks upon the Quebec Church as an all powerful, dominating institution, with emphasis on the "dominating". He sees in its organisation much more paternalism than he has been brought up to accept. He differs radically from that church in certain matters of creed. But if he is fair he must give his Quebec neighbours the credit of putting their church in the first place in their lives. Can he say as much of his own province? Is the modern fondness for a purely secular state, with the church in the distant background or somewhere beyond the horizon, based altogether on considerations of equity and democracy? Under such pretexts as toleration and "a proper-place-for-everything", but in reality under the sinister compulsion of an enthroned secularism, religion — supposedly the chief concern of us mortals — is practically ignored, even in its "modernized" form, in the schools where the children of Protestant Ontario spend five days out of every seven; while in the schools of the French-Canadian province this subject occupies a definite and honoured place in the curriculum.

Percival F. MORLEY.

II. From the *Montreal Gazette*, Dec. 17, 1919 :

Quebec, December, 16.—Addressing the Quebec Canadian Club here to-day, Sir Andrew Macphail, of McGill University, and editor of the McGill University Magazine, said that without the Province of Quebec, Canada could not be governed, and affirmed that if the spirit of Quebec be maintained, this province will be the last refuge of civilization on the continent.

Quebec, he said, was fundamentally conservative. It was in the very nature of the French-Canadians. They imbibed it from their family and religious training. Quebecers were referred to as Canadians and there was nothing more true. It was very significant that the spirit of Quebec governed Canada, and without that spirit Canada could not be governed...

The province of Quebec, he said, had the best farms and the best farmers in Canada. Quebec did not depend on industries alone. On account of her system of education, the province of Quebec had led Canada since 1840. The people had inherited the qualities of their forefathers, and these qualities, which had kept France to the fore in Europe had also kept Quebec in the lead in Canada.

He praised the Catholic church for its spirit of toleration and said that the Protestant churches could learn from it to become broader in their views and especially in political matters. Protestant clergymen often made political speeches, while members of the Catholic clergy did not do so.

Quebec's greatest asset, he affirmed, was the French-Canadian woman. It was she who had brought into the world millions of Canadians.

In Quebec marriage was a sacrament, there was no divorce and the family was safe. It was the spirit of Quebec that made of the province a paradise of common sense, of political wisdom and of personal liberty. If that spirit could be maintained, Quebec would be the last refuge of civilization on the continent.

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